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AUTHOR Bordin-Sandler, Suzanne
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses punishment as a means of modifying children's behavior, and related several attempts to train parents and child care workers in effective use of pubishment. The author first notes the distinction between punishment and corporal punishment. She views the latter as both unnecessary and harmful since it teaches the child to be an aggressor. Some of the acceptable forms of punishment described are negative practice, overcorrection, loss of privileges, extinction and time-out. The parent training program is based on the realization that corporal punishment is often the result of parental frustration; thus, it is only raised as an issue when the parents have been taught and can successfully use other techniques in modifying their child's behaviors. In the program with child care personnel, the issue of corporal punishment is raised earlier since that program is shorter and less experiential. Such training programs are important and could usefully be provided by children's centers. (NG)

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"IF YOU DON'T STOP HITTING YOUR SISTER, I'M GOING TO BEAT YOUR BRAINS IN!"

Suzanne Bordin-Sandler, Sagamore Children's Center, Melville, N.Y. 11746

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Don Juan and I had been talking about different things in a relaxed and unstructured manner. I told him about a friend of mine and his dilemma with his nine year old son. The child, who had been living with the mother for the past four years, was then living with my friend, and the problem was what to do with him? According to my friend the child was a misfit in school; he lacked concentration and was not interested in anything. He was given to tantrums, disruptive behavior, and to running away from home.....

"What can my friend do?", I asked.

"The worst thing he could do is to force the child to agree with him", don Juan said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that that child shouldn't be spanked or scared by his father when he doesn't behave the way he wants him to."

"How can he teach him anything if he isn't firm with him?"

"Your friend should let someone else spank the child."

"He can't let anyone else touch his little boy", I said, surprised at his suggestion..... I asked him to explain his statements.

"If I were your friend", don Juan said, "I would start by hiring someone to spank the little guy. I would go to skid row and hire the worst-looking man I could find."

"To scare a little boy?"

"Not just to scare a little boy, you fool. That little fellow must be stopped, and being beaten by his father won't do it. If one wants to stop our fellow men, one must always be outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure".....

"Tell me more about what my friend should do with his little boy", I said.

"Tell him to go to skid row and very carefully select an ugly-looking derelict", he went on.

"Tell him to get a young one. One who still has some strength left in him."

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> Don Juan then delineated a strange strategy. I was to instruct my friend to have the man follow him or wait for him at a place where he would go with his son. The man, in response to a prearranged cue to be given after any objectionable behavior on the part of the child, was supposed to leap from a hiding place, pick the child up, and bank the living daylights out of him.
> "After the man scares him, your friend must help the little boy regain his confidence, in any way he can"
> .....
> "What if the fright injures him?"
> "Fright never injures anyone. What injures the spirit is having someone always on your back, beating you, telling you what to do and what not to do."
>
> Carlos Castaneda, Journey to Ixtlan.

This symbolic transaction between a sorcerer and his apprentice illustrates a very different way of viewing the needs of a growing and developing human being, and the obligations of those who undertake his care. Don Juan is saying that in order for the child to understand the nature of reality and how to gain power and control over his environment, he must confront the dangers of an unloving and unpredictable world. The persons who are committed to guiding the child into independence must teach him that the world is harsh so that he can learn how to survive, but they should never be directly involved in that lesson. That is, they must stay 'outside the circle that presses him so that they can direct the pressure' and teach the child not to be a victim. In our culture it is more common for the child to experience the harshness of the world directly from his own parents. Consequently, instead of learning how not to be a victim, he learns to be an aggressor. Urban areas are becoming enured to the phenomenon of violent acts committed by young children who have learned this method of coping with the world at home. Increases in reported cases of child abuse are part of the

general increase in tolerance of violence, which appears to be correlated with the rapid growth in environmental complexity. What can we do about the alarming trend towards acceptance of violence as a legitimate method of coping with a complex and frustrating world? One place to begin is in the family, where our next generation is contending with its first and most crucial exposure to the nature of the world.

The use of corporal punishment to socialize children is widely accepted among Americans as both appropriate and a parental prerogative. Although child abuse is viewed as a criminal act, many people fail to see the connection between the cultural sanctioning of mild physical pain to discipline children and the occurrence of child abuse resulting in physical trauma or death. Despite the well-known finding that child abusers most frequently were themselves abused during childhood, many persons do not believe that the same modeling of violent behavior takes place when less extreme forms of physical punishment are used in the child-rearing process.

Behavior Modification has tended to take a neutral position on the use of aversive control, despite the emphasis that it has placed on positive methods of changing behavior. The most salient reason for this stance is the success that has been obtained with the application of electric shock and other painful stimuli to terminate high-frequency self-destructive behavior in severely psychotic and retarded children. The rationale behind the use of these methods is that they are more humane than allowing the child to continue hurting himself. In addition, research shows that these children cannot be taught more adaptive behaviors while they are engaging in self-stimulation. However, clinical psychologists and others who have found the behavioral

approach to be valuable and who are working with children in applied, rather than research, settings most often do not share this point of view. Those of us involved in parent training are especially concerned about the issue of corporal punishment since it comes up so frequently in our everyday work.

Sagamore Children's Center is a state psychiatric facility serving children up to the age of fourteen. Services provided by Sagamore include inpatient psychiatric care, short-term hospitalization out-patient evaluations and therapy, as well as respite services. As part of an effort to provide parents with an alternative to hospitalization as a solution to problems with their children and to prevent readmission, the Behavior Management Unit at Sagamore was developed to be an adjunct to these services by providing programs to help families cope more successfully with their children at home. These programs, primarily parent training, are available to families of inpatients, out-patients, and families in the community who have no other formal relationship with the Center. In some cases, these programs are open to Sagamore staff and professionals from other resources involved with delivering services to children and families. A variety of workshops and other group approaches are offered to parents who are experiencing difficulties with their children, such as behavior problems, learning disabilities, hyperactivity or autism. Each of these programs is specifically tailored to the group it serves, but certain themes are common to all. It is generally assumed that a child's behavior is greatly affected by his environment and that parental behavior makes a significant impact on that environment. Therefore, if parents learn affective techniques for changing behavior, they can help their child to acquire constructive strategies to solve his

problems. These techniques include basic principles of how behavior is learned and maintained, as well as how to communicate productively with the child. It is important to understand that although we work mainly with parents, we do not assume that the parents have caused their child's problem, but rather that when problems do occur, for whatever reason, parents can do something about them, (Kaufman, 1975). Although positive methods are stressed in these courses, punishment has to be confronted and clarified in terms of effects and appropriate usage. The present author has developed several methods of dealing with the issue of corporal punishment which may be helpful to other professionals who work intensively with children and parents.

In general, it is important to make a distinction between corporal punishment and punishment per se when teaching parents child management techniques. In addition, the timing of the presentation of information about punishment, and its appropriate uses, has been found to be an important variable in successful attitude change. The approach used is not to deal with punishment in detail at all until the parent has learned consistently to use positive methods, such as contingent praise and approval, effectively. This level of competency usually occurs by the seventh or eighth two-hour weekly group session. The topic of punishment invariably comes up early in training since most parents have used punishment as their primary mode of controlling their children and are frustrated and mystified about why it has not worked. Often the parent suggests that perhaps what is needed is more intense and more frequent spankings. When this happens, the class is told about some of the negative aspects of punishment, and it is explained that even mild forms of punishment are inadvisable because they result in avoidance of and escape from the punisher. This consequence is

inconsistent with the wish expressed by most parents that their children come to them when they need help or have problems. Corporal punishment is particularly devalued not only because of the strong emotions accompanying its use, but because it has the additional side-effect of teaching children how to be aggressive towards others. Most parents are aware of the modeling component of physical punishment, but are unwilling to stop using it since they do not know other ways to correct their children. Therefore, at this point, early in training, parents are reassured that positive methods can be effective and that punishment and its appropriate usage will be discussed fully later in the course.

When the parent has experienced some success with positive techniques and is feeling more confident about his or her ability to regain control over the child rearing process, information about punishment is presented, and the various alternatives to corporal punishment (for example, negative practice, overcorrection, loss of privileges, extinction, time-out) are introduced to help change behaviors which are not responding to a reward system alone. It is recognized that punishment must sometimes be used, as when the nature or the intensity of the problem behavior presents a serious question of safety for the child or others. But parents are also told that it is unnecessary to use corporal punishment to achieve elimination or reduction of the problem behavior. Alternative punishment procedures are explained to the parents, and it is demonstrated how they can be applied in everyday family situations. It is emphasized that these milder forms of punishment are more likely to be effective when used infrequently and that the child will accept them without long-lasting emotional consequences as long as he is given the opportunity to

regain parental approval. These forms of punishment can effectively reduce or eliminate inappropriate behavior without exposing the child to physical pain and its negative psychological side-effects. In addition, these corrective procedures provide parents with a way of conveying to the child their displeasure with his behavior without experiencing the guilt and sorrow that accompanies the act of striking one's own child.

Negative practice, (Yates, 1970) consists of having the child repeat the offense until it becomes aversive. This approach is often effective with inappropriate behavior such as striking matches. Over-correction (Foxx and Azrin, 1973) was developed as an alternative to the use of painful stimuli to terminate self-stimulation and other intrinsically rewarding, but functionally useless, behaviors which interfere with the acquisition of more adaptive behaviors. While developed for intervention with retarded and autistic children this method can be used to help any child discontinue high frequency behavior which is presenting problems to himself or others. Overcorrection involves having the child go beyond what is required for a demonstration that he understands the consequences of his act. For example, a child who threw his plate on the kitchen floor because he did not like its contents would be made to clean up not just the food he threw, but the whole kitchen floor. Loss of privileges is a commonly used form of punishment, but most parents must be taught not only how to determine the appropriate extent of the privilege loss, but how to give the child an opportunity to earn back the valued activities. Extinction (Woodward and Schlosberg, 1954) is a procedure that involves neither reward nor punishment. That is, the parent

simply ignores the behavior. Since the extinction process generally produces a temporary increase in and escalation of the response, the parent is encouraged to simultaneously strengthen behavior incompatibl with the response. For example, tantrums can be eliminated by no longer attending to them, but at the same time, the child can be helped to avoid resorting to tantrums by providing him with other activities at times when he is prone to this kind of loss of control. Obviously, extinction cannot be used when the behavior in question is destructive or dangerous. Time-out (Ullmann & Krasner, 1969) involves temporary removal of the child from the company of significant others when he persists in inappropriate behavior. How time-out functions is poorly understood, but is usually viewed as punishing, since the child loses the opportunity to interact with rewarding aspects of his environment. However, there is some observational evidence that time-out may also provide the child with a respite when he becomes too disorganized to correct his behavior. Parents can als put themselves in time-out when the child refuses to discontinue an objectionable behavior. For example, the mother of children who constantly squabble and fight can simply remove herself to an inaccessib room, instructing the children that she will return as soon as they calm down and are ready to play cooperatively. These are some of the alternatives to spanking children when they misbehave which have been shown to be effective methods of punishment.

If the parents are resistant to discontinuing physical punishmen citing their own adult emotional intactness despite the fact that the were hit during childhood, it is demonstrated to them that, in fact,

this procedure did not work. Instead of learning not to repeat the punishable offense they actually learned more efficient ways of preventing their parents from finding out they had done something wrong. It is pointed out that such avoidance of the punisher results from fear and rage. When these strong emotions are present, the child is unable to focus on the inappropriate behavior that incurred the parent's wrath and, instead, directs his attention towards the punisher. The net result is that the child learns to hate and fear the parent rather than learning that his behavior was inappropriate and should not be repeated for that reason. From this point of view, physical punishment does not work. Again, it is important to note that these ideas are more persuasive when they are introduced after the parent has been successful with positive methods, and is more receptive to the idea that corporal punishment can be discontinued altogether, reserving other forms of punishment for those occasions when all else fails.

The described method of dealing with the issue of corporal punishment was incorporated into a general Behavior Modification course taught to Civil Service personnel, most of whom held lower-level positions in state children's facilities and were in direct contact with children in their daily work. Since the class was quite large and less personally involved with the consequences of inappropriate ways of managing children than the people who enroll in our parent training classes, it was felt that a more drastic technique was necessary to convincingly deliver the message that corporal punishment is not especially effective nor is it a right. At the introductory session the Lovaas film, Teaching Language to Psychotic

Children (Prentice-Hall, Inc.) was shown without prior comment. In the course of this film, the use of electric shock to eliminate self-stimulation in autistic children is discussed, although the actual application of shock is not shown. When asked for reactions to the film, everyone focused with horror on the use of shock on helpless children. This provided a natural entree to the delivery of an anti-corporal punishment lecture and enabled the author to make the point that it is illogical to base one's position on corporal punishment on the intensity of physical pain inflicted. The subject of punishment was never brought up again until much later in the course after positive methods had been thoroughly presented. At this time the class was able to accept the idea that methods other than pain infliction were both effective and preferable in coping with the many irritating and inappropriate behaviors that all children present in the course of ordinary development.

Thus, attitude change towards the appropriateness of corporal punishment was effected in two group situations involving persons entrusted with the care of children. In one case, parent training in the principles and applications of behavior modification techniques was used as a vehicle to demonstrate that positive methods of changing behavior are more effective and, therefore, preferable to punishment. Detailed information about punishment was withheld until the parents became skilled in the use of positive methods. Resistance to discontinuation of corporal punishment was more easily overcome when parents had learned alternative modes of dealing with inappropriate behavior. In the other case, the issue of corporal punishment was presented to civil service personnel taking a general behavior modification course,

many of whom worked directly with children. Here timing was also manipulated to maximize the probability that negative information on corporal punishment would be accepted, or at least considered, by the class. Instead of delaying the discussion of corporal punishment, as in parent training, a powerful film was shown during the introductory session to make the point that a value judgment on violent behavior cannot be made by referring to the intensity of the painful stimulus alone. Thereafter, discussions of punishment were handled similarly to the procedure used in parent training. Since the general course did not provide the impact of "learning by doing", it was felt that attitude change towards corporal punishment could be best effected by using a dramatic approach. Both methods of persuasion appear to be potentially successful ways to get people to reexamine their beliefs concerning the value and necessity of the use of corporal punishment to socialize children. Research will be needed to substantiate the informal evidence that these methods are worthwhile.

At Sagamore Children's Center, we have been successful in changing the attitudes of parents and others who control children's lives in regard to the use of corporal punishment. It is hoped that others can benefit from some of our methods.